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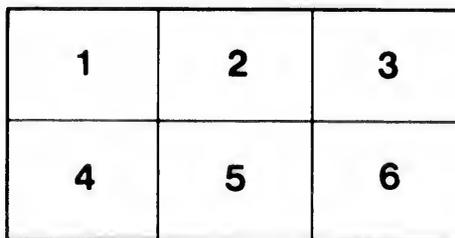
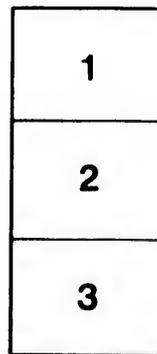
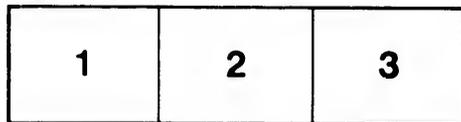
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ART. VI.—*Journal of the Arctic Land Expedition to the Mouth of the Great Fish River, and along the shores of the Arctic Ocean, in the Years 1833, 1834, and 1835.* By Captain Back, R. N. Commander of the Expedition. 1 vol. 8vo. London, Murray. Paris, Galignani. Brussels, Pratt & Barry. Leipsig, Black & Armstrong. Frankfort, Jügel. Philadelphia, Carey & Hart. 1836.

THIS is an honest book—the production of a plain, straight-forward, veracious traveller—and that is saying a great deal. If Captain Back be not known to the reading world as an author, his name, at least, is familiar to all who have taken any interest in the northern expeditions of Franklin and Richardson, of whose perilous adventures he was the constant sharer and unflinching companion. In the course of these enterprizes he distinguished himself on two occasions, the object being that of extending the geography of the sea-coast of the Arctic regions of North-America, and of confirming the accounts given by Hearne and Mackenzie, the first travellers who had reached these shores; and at the same time to endeavor to ascertain the continuity or otherwise of a water-communication between Behring's Strait and Hudson's Bay. There is nothing perhaps on record more truly affecting than the simple and unadorned tale told by Sir John Franklin of the almost unparalleled sufferings which he and his companions were doomed to undergo from the fatigue of travelling hundreds of miles amidst frost and snow-storms, without shelter, without fire, and without food; so nearly at one time reduced to a state of absolute starvation, as to be driven to the last resource of devouring their own shoes and leather gun-cases, rendered somewhat perhaps more palatable by the addition of a miserably bitter lichen which they picked off the rocks. We advert to these adventures now to show that Captain Back, in voluntarily undertaking the one here recorded, was fully aware of the dangers, the privations, and the hardships which it was all but certain it would be his lot again to suffer. It was with such a prospect before his eyes, that on hearing, when in Italy, in the year 1832, that the fate of Ross and his companions still remained uncertain, he hastened to England, with the intention of offering his services to government to conduct an expedition in search of them. He arrived here at the moment when such an expedition was in preparation; and it is almost unnecessary to add that the volunteer services of Captain (then Commander) Back were joyfully accepted.

After the accounts we have formerly given of the expeditions under Sir John Franklin and Dr. Richardson in the northern regions of America, it would be idle in us to enter into a particular description of the incidents in Captain Back's. In his own nervous and picturesque narrative, the details of even the first part of his travels are most interesting: the best analysis we could afford would seem a mere repetition.

Captain Back left London on the 17th February, 1333, accompanied by Mr. King, a surgeon, and three men, two of whom had gained experience under Sir John Franklin. At New York they received every possible attention and hospitality; and a steam-vessel was offered for their conveyance to Albany. Nothing could exceed the kindness and exertions of Governor Simpson and all the servants of the Hudson's Bay Company. A sufficient number of *voyageurs* were procured at La Chine; and Captain Back was ready to leave Norway House on the 28th June with sixteen persons, consisting of steersmen, carpenters, artillery-men, fishermen, and *voyageurs*, to whom were afterwards added nine others.

'This,' says the Captain, 'was a happy day for me; and as the canoe pushed off from the bank, my heart swelled with hope and joy. Now, for the first time, I saw myself in a condition to verify the kind anticipations of my friends. The preliminary difficulties had been overcome: I was fairly on the way to the accomplishment of the benevolent errand on which I had been commissioned; and the contemplation of an object so worthy of all exertion, in which I thought myself at length free to indulge, raised my spirits to a more than ordinary pitch of excitement.'—p. 57.

At Pine Portage he met with Mr. McLeod, one of the Hudson's Bay Company's servants, and though this gentleman was on his way to Canada for the re-establishment of his health, no sooner did he learn the humane object of the mission, than he determined at once to sacrifice his own plans to the pleasure of becoming the companion of Back; by which disinterested act, six persons—Mr. McLeod, his wife, three children, and a servant—were added to the eight, who with their baggage had already pretty well filled the single canoe. This, however, it appears, was nothing unusual, and not to be compared with the compact way in which the Indians stow themselves. A whole fleet of their canoes was met on the Slave River descending from the Great Slave Lake: the description of one of them is as follows:—

'It was small even for a canoe; and how eight men, women, and children contrived to

stow away their legs in a space not more than large enough for three Europeans, would have been a puzzling problem to one unaccustomed with the suppleness of an Indian's unbandaged limbs. There, however, they were, in a temperature of 66°, packed heads and tails, like Yarmouth herrings—half naked—their hair in elf-locks, long and matted—filthy beyond description—and all squalling together. To complete the picture, their dogs, scarce one degree below them, formed a sort of body guard on each side of the river, and as the canoe glided away with the current, all the animals together, human and canine, set up a shrill and horrible yell.'—p. 79.

From the chief of these people, who went by the name of 'Le Camarade de Mandeville,' Captain Back received important information, which he afterwards ascertained to be correct, of two great rivers beyond the Great Slave Lake, the Teh-lon and the Thlew-ec-choh, the latter of which he was destined to navigate to its source. On the 8th August the party reached Great Slave Lake, and were received at Fort Resolution, a station of the Hudson's Bay Company, by Mr. McDonnell, the gentleman in charge. Determined to lose no time in search of the river that was to conduct him to the sea, Captain Back set out on the 11th, in an old canoe, with his servant, an Englishman, a Canadian, two half-breeds, and two Indians, on an exploring expedition. All was plain sailing as far as the eastern portion of Great Slave Lake, into which fell an unknown river, with a steep and rocky bed, to which the name of *Hoarfrost River* was given. We have a beautiful print of Beverley's Fall, near the mouth of this river, which will convey an idea of what these falls, so very numerous in all the rivers in North America, are. Indeed, this particular river was so encumbered with cascades and rapids, that not only their baggage and provisions but the canoe also had to be carried up the high, steep, and rugged ridges, over swamps of thick stum'ed firs, and open spaces barren and desolate, on which 'crag was piled upon crag to a height of two thousand feet from the base.' The labor was excessive; but, says our traveller—

'The laborious duty which had been thus satisfactorily performed was rendered doubly severe by the combined attack of myriads of sand-flies and mosquitoes, which made our faces stream with blood. There is certainly no form of wretchedness, among those to which the chequered life of a *voyageur* is exposed, at once so great and so humiliating, as the torture inflicted by these puny blood-suckers. To avoid them is impossible; and as for defending himself, though for a time he may go on crushing by thousands, he can-

not long that at throws earth, groans a p. 117.

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not long maintain the unequal conflict; so that at last, subdued by pain and fatigue, he throws himself in despair with his face to the earth, and half suffocated in his blanket, groans away a few hours of sleepless rest."—p. 117.

The mild and gentle character of the gallant Franklin is generally well known; but Back mentions an anecdote, of which he was reminded by an old Indian, of his patient and humane forbearance even to the meanest and most tormenting of God's creatures:—

'It was the custom of Sir John Franklin never to kill a fly, and, though teased by them beyond expression, especially when engaged in taking observations, he would quietly desist from his work, and patiently blow the half-gorged intruders from his hands—"the world was wide enough for both." This was jocosely remarked upon at the time by Akaitcho and the four or five Indians who accompanied him; but the impression, it seems, had sunk deep, for on Maufly's seeing me fill my tent with smoke, and then throw open the front and bent the sides all round with leafy branches, to drive out the stifled pests before I went to rest, he could not refrain from expressing his surprise that I should be so unlike the *old chief*, who would not destroy so much as a single mosquito.'—p. 180.

It would almost seem that these creatures are imperishable; at least they survive a second year. If we recollect rightly, it is Ellis, in his account of the doleful voyage of Captain James, who says, he carried a frozen mass of what he thought peat, and laid it before the fire, when shortly the whole room was filled with a cloud of mosquitos; they had clustered together, and become a frozen mass, like bees when about to cast their swarms. Many other of the inferior and cold-blooded classes of animals freeze in the winter and revive in the spring. The swarms of sand-flies—called *brulots* by the Canadians—seem to be fully as annoying as the mosquitos.

'As we dived into the confined and suffocating chasms, or waded through the close swamps, they rose in clouds, actually darkening the air: to see or to speak was equally difficult, for they rushed at every undefended part, and fixed their poisonous fangs in an instant. Our faces streamed with blood, as if leeches had been applied; and there was a burning and irritating pain, followed by immediate inflammation, and producing giddiness which almost drove us mad. Whenever we halted, which the nature of the country compelled us to do often, the men, even Indians, threw themselves on their faces, and moaned with pain and agony. My arms being less encumbered, I defended myself in some degree by waving a branch in each hand; but

even with this and the aid of a veil and stout leather gloves, I did not escape without severe punishment. For the time, I thought the tiny plagues worse even than mosquitos.'—p. 179.

The river became more rocky, and cataract succeeded cataract in quick succession, so as to render it perfectly unnavigable. At length

'One or two more rapids, and a narrow fall of twenty feet, terminated the ascent of this turbulent and unfriendly river. Nothing, however, can be more romantically beautiful than the wild scenery of its course. High rocks beetling over the rapids like towers, or rent into the most diversified forms, gay with various-colored mosses, or shaded by overhanging trees—now a tranquil pool, lying like a sheet of silver—now the dash and foam of a cataract,—these are a part only of its picturesque and striking features.'—p. 119.

Here a poor Indian came up, who had left the party some days before with only two charges of powder, which he had lost, imploring something for his family to eat. 'Had there been only my wife with me,' he said in a faint voice, 'I would not have troubled the chief, for we could have lived upon berries; but when I looked upon my child, and heard its cries, my heart failed me, and I sought for relief.' More rapids were to be passed, and more fatiguing portages to be surmounted, much to the annoyance of the crew. At length, however, they gained the summit.

Beyond this was a lake with some dark fir-trees on its margin, and farther on another of very considerable dimensions to which Back gave the name of Walnesley. But it now became evident that the guide was completely at fault, and he admitted that he had not been in this part of the country since he was a boy. They continued, however, to paddle away along the edge of a sheet of old ice. The thermometer was down to 31°, yet the mosquitos and the *brulots* swarmed innumerable, and were most tormenting. At the spot where they encamped no living thing besides these was seen or heard; the air was calm, the lake unruffled—"it seemed," says our traveller, "as if Nature had fallen into a trance, for all was silent and motionless as death." At length the guide discovered some sand-hills, and beyond them a great lake, at the sight of which his countenance lighted up, and he said, doubtfully, 'These places look familiar to me.' The canoe was dragged among the sand-hills, and having navigated Clinton-Golden Lake, they entered the largest that had yet occurred. To this splendid sheet of water Captain Back gave the name of Aylmer, in honor of

the late governor-general of Canada. On the high sand-hills at the eastern extremity of this lake Captain Back observed some little rills of water, which took a northerly direction towards a small lake, which, though the height of the land, intervening between it and the lake he had just left, was not a great many feet, he was willing to hope might be the source of the river he had long been in search of; and so it turned out to be. To this source he gave the name of Sussex, in honor of the Royal Duke. Back soon satisfied himself that he had now discovered the Thlew-ee-choh, or, as the Geographical Society have very properly called it, and as we shall hereafter do—*Back's River*. The month of August had expired, and having made this important discovery, he deemed it prudent and indeed imperative on him to return. This he effected by a different route, and by a different river, which, falling into a large sheet of water, named by him the Artillery Lake, led to the eastern extremity of Great Slave Lake, near the spot where Mr. McLeod had been sent to establish their winter-quarters, and where, on their arrival, he found the newly erected frame-work of a house at the bottom of a snug cove, backed by the dark-green foliage of a wood of firs-trees. The completion of this establishment for the winter went on cheerily:—

'The men were divided into parties, and appointed to regular tasks: some to the felling of trees, and squaring them into beams or rafters; others to the sawing of slabs and planks. Here was a group awkwardly chipping the shapeless granite into something like form; and there a party in a boat in search of mud and grass for mortar. It was an animated scene; and, set off as it was by the white tents and smoky leather lodges, contrasting with the mountains and green woods, it was picturesque as well as interesting.'—p. 190.

Numbers of Indians, especially the old, the sick, and the miserable, soon found their way to the house of the white man, in search of that succor and relief from starvation, which is rarely in the power of their own countrymen to bestow. It is a remarkable trait in their character that, kind and affectionate as they are to their children, they are totally indifferent to the wants and the sufferings of the aged and the infirm. A poor old woman was found on the opposite side of the bay, helpless and alone, 'bent double by age and infirmities, and rendered absolutely frightful by famine and disease.' As a specimen of too numerous a class, we give Back's description of this poor creature:—

'Clad in deer-skins, her eyes all but closed,

her hair matted and filthy, her skin shrivelled, and feebly supporting, with the aid of a stick held by both hands, a trunk which was literally horizontal, she presented, if such an expression may be pardoned, the shocking and unnatural appearance of a human brute. It was a humiliating spectacle, and one which I would not willingly see again. Poor wretch! Her tale was soon told: old and decrepit, she had come to be considered as a burden even by her own sex. Past services and toils were forgotten; and in their figurative style they coldly told her that, "though she appeared to live, she was already dead," and must be abandoned to her fate. "There is a new fort," said they; "go there; the whites are great medicine men, and may have power to save you." This was a month before; since which time she had crawled and hobbled along the rocks, the scanty supply of berries which she found upon them just enabling her to live. Another day or two must have ended her sufferings.'—p. 193.

It was not till the end of October that the river and the borders of the lake were frozen over; and meantime the sufferings of the Indians for want of food became extreme. These poor people, seeing the instruments in the observatory, were but too ready to ascribe to them the mysterious cause of all their misfortunes; nor were they singular in this: two of the *voyageurs*, says Captain Back, 'when we were taking the dip, hearing the words "*Now!—Stop!*" always succeeded by a perfect silence, looked at each other, and, with significant shrugs, turning hastily away from the railing, reported to their companions that they verily believed I was raising the devil.' It was not that there was actually any scarcity of deer or musk-oxen; several hundreds in a group were frequently seen; but the mildness of the season and the abundance of the reindeer lichen kept them beyond the usual period on the barren plains, where they could not be got at within gunshot distance. Not only the deer but the fishery failed them; and the mild weather continuing, by the end of November all their supplies had been exhausted. 'Distress was prevalent, and the din and screeching of women and children too plainly indicated the acuteness of their suffering.' At this moment the appearance of Captain Back's old acquaintance of a former expedition, Akaitcho, with a little meat, enabled him to grant a momentary relief. This ancient chief wore the silver medal which had been given to him at Fort Enterprise by Sir John Franklin, as a proof that he had not forgotten his friends. Many of the Indians went off with this old hunter, who promised the Captain that he and his people should not want as long as he could procure anything to send to the fort,

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Towards the end of December absolute famine stared the whole party in the face. The Indians in shoals fell back on the fort as the only chance of prolonging their existence.

'In vain did we endeavor to revive their drooping spirits, and excite them to action; the scourge was too heavy, and their exertions were entirely paralysed. No sooner had one party closed the door, than another, still more languid and distressed, feebly opened it, and confirmed by their half-famished looks and sunken eyes their heart-rending tale of suffering. They spoke little, but crowded in silence round the fire, as if eager to enjoy the only comfort remaining to them. A handful of mouldy pounded meat, which had been originally reserved for our dogs, was the most liberal allowance we could make to each; and this meal, unpalatable and unwholesome as it was, together with the customary presentation of the friendly pipe, was sufficient to efface for a moment the recollection of their sorrows, and even to light up their faces with a smile of hope. "We know," they said, "that you are as much distressed as ourselves, and you are very good." Afflicting as it was to behold such scenes of suffering, it was at the same time gratifying to observe the resignation with which they were met. There were no impious upbraids of Providence, nor any of those revolting acts, too frequent within late years, which have cast a darker shade over the character of the Indian.'—p. 210.

'Our hall was in a manner filled with invalids and other stupidly-dejected beings, who, seated round the fire, occupied themselves in roasting and devouring small bits of their reindeer garments, which, even when entire, afforded them a very insufficient protection against a temperature of 102° below the freezing point. The father torpid and despairing—the mother, with a hollow and sepulchral wail, vainly endeavoring to soothe the infant, which with unceasing moan clung to her shrivelled and exhausted breast—the passive child gazing vacantly around; such was one of the many groups that surrounded us.'—p. 218.

'Often,' says Captain Back, 'did I share my own plate with the children, whose helpless state and piteous cries were peculiarly distressing: compassion for the full grown may or may not be felt, but that heart must be eased in steel which is insensible to the cry of a child for food.' The lamentable situation in which they were placed, the scanty rations of pemmican to which the party was reduced, produced, however, no sullen or sulky looks in the fine fellows Back had engaged in England and Canada: they were always cheerful and in good spirits. Back, in imitation of his old commander Franklin, instituted an evening school for their amusement. He pursued his astronomical obser-

vations, and when the thermometer at the end of December was at 70° below zero, made experiments on the effect and intensity of the cold on sulphuric and nitric ether, and pyrologenic acid, which are curious; but we must pass over the results.

'Such, indeed, was the abstraction of heat, that with eight large logs of dry wood in the fireplace of a small room, I could not get the thermometer higher than 12° plus. Ink and paint froze. The sextant cases, and boxes of seasoned wood, principally fir, all split. Nor was the sensation particularly agreeable to our persons; the skin of the hands especially became dry, cracked, and opened into unsightly and smarting gashes, which we were obliged to anoint with grease. On one occasion, after washing my face within three feet of the fire, my hair was actually clotted with ice before I had time to dry it. From these facts some idea may, perhaps, be formed of the excessive cold. It seemed to have driven all living things from us: we had been accustomed to see a few white partridges about, but even these, hardy as they are, had disappeared. Once, indeed, a solitary raven, whose croak made me run out to look at him, swept round the house, but immediately winged his flight to the westward. Nothing but the passing wind broke the awful solitude of this barren and desolate spot.'—p. 223.

The sufferings of the poor Indians at this period are not to be described. 'Famine, with her gaunt and bony arm,' says Back, 'pursued them at every turn, withered their energies, and strewed them lifeless on the cold bosom of the snow.' Nine had fallen victims already, and others were on the eve of perishing, when old Akaitcho, during this appalling period of suffering and calamity, proved himself the firm friend of the expedition. By his encouraging language and fortitude he kept up their desponding spirits, boldly encountered every difficulty, and made others act by the force of his example. Mautsky, also, another Indian chief, came opportunely with the joyful information, that he had five deer killed for them within a couple of days' walk. Shortly after another chief, Le Camarade de Mandeville, brought to the fort two sledges of dried meat; and at the same time came a further supply from Mr. M'Leod, who had gone to a distance with a fishing party; accompanied, however, with the painful intelligence, that he and his family were surrounded by difficulties, privations, and deaths. 'Six more natives of either sex had sunk under the horrors of starvation.'

To add to the affliction suffered by Captain Back, he received a packet from Hudson's Bay by a person who told him that his old friend Augustus, the former affectionate

Esquimaux interpreter, no sooner heard that he was again in the country than he resolved to join him; and he had actually walked from Hudson's Bay with that intention, in company of a Canadian and an Iroquois. They lost their way, separated, and poor Augustus fell a sacrifice to famine; his body was some time after this found in the burrens. 'He was,' says Captain Back, 'a faithful, disinterested, kind-hearted creature, who had won the regard not of myself only, but I may add of Sir J. Franklin and Dr. Richardson also, by qualities which, wherever found, in the lowest as in the highest forms of social life, are the ornament and charm of humanity.'

About the middle of April the prospects of the party began to brighten, and active preparations were making for their expedition to the sea-coast. On the 25th of that month a messenger arrived with a packet, which brought Captain Back the welcome intelligence of the safety of Ross and his party. The excitement and hurry of his feelings may well be imagined. He says—

'In the fulness of our hearts we assembled together, and humbly offered up our thanks to that merciful Providence, which in the beautiful language of Scripture hath said, "Mine own will I bring again, as I did sometime from the deeps of the sea." The thought of so wonderful a preservation overpowered for a time the common occurrences of life. We had but just sat down to breakfast; but our appetite was gone, and the day was passed in a feverish state of excitement. Seldom, indeed, did my friend Mr. King or I indulge in a libation, but on this joyful occasion economy was forgotten; a treat was given to the men, and for ourselves the social sympathies were quickened by a generous bowl of punch.'—p. 245.

This intelligence determined Back to proceed to the shore of the Arctic Sea with one boat only; this plan would suit best the reduced state of the party and their provisions;—while those left behind, in the summer season, would have no difficulty, with the assistance of the Indians, not only to supply themselves with food, but also to collect a quantity for general use against the Captain's return from the northward.

It was the 7th June when Captain Back, accompanied by Mr. King, left Fort Reliance. We can easily imagine with what sensations this brave and zealous traveller set out on this expedition of discovery; how delighted to escape from the wretchedness of a dreary and disastrous winter—from scenes and tales of suffering and death—from wearisome inaction and monotony—from disappointment and heart-sickening care. 'Before me,' he

says, 'were novelty and enterprise; hope, curiosity, and the love of adventure were my companions; and even the prospect of difficulties and dangers to be encountered, with the responsibility inseparable from command, instead of damping, rather heightened the enjoyment of the moment.'

It is not necessary to take notice of their progress along the same, or pretty much the same, tract of country they had passed over on their return from Back's River the preceding autumn. It may suffice to say, that on the 28th June the boat was carried over the last and short portage which divides the waters running to the south from those taking a northerly direction; and in the afternoon they had the satisfaction of launching the boat into Back's River, which, from previous information, they had every reason to hope would convey them into the Arctic Sea. The weather had been generally most severe during the month of June—the thermometer below the freezing point—foggy, and attended with storms of snow, hail, and rain: yet, at the end of May, a week before they started, the weather had become so sultry, that the temperature in the sun rose to 106°, forming an extraordinary contrast with that of the 17th January, when the thermometer stood at 70° below zero.

Mr. McLeod and his party here took leave, and returned to Fort Resolution on the 8th July. Back's party now consisted of ten persons only—himself and Mr. King, two Highlanders, two half-breeds, one man from Orkney, and three English artillerymen. The weight for the boat to carry was estimated at 3360 pounds, exclusive of the awning, masts, yards, sails, spare oars, poles, planking, and the crew. For many days past the weather had been thick and foggy, but on its clearing away suddenly, the branching antlers of twenty reindeer were seen spreading over the summits of the adjacent hills. To see and pursue were the work of a moment.

'It was a beautiful and interesting sight, for the sun shone out, and lighting up some parts east others into deeper shade; the white ice reflected millions of dazzling rays; the rapid leapt and chafed in little ripples, which melted away into the unruflled surface of the slumbering lake; abrupt and craggy rocks frowned on the right; and, on the left, the brown landscape receded until it was lost in the distant blue mountains. The foreground was filled up with the ochre-coloured lodges of the Indians, contrasting with our own pale tents; and to the whole scene animation was given by the graceful motions of the unstartled deer, and the trencherous crawling of the wary hunters.'—p. 307.

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kind of difficulties and perils they were likely to experience from the character of the river—fall of rapids, cascades, and cataracts, the descent of which, Back says, 'made him hold his breath; expecting to see the boat dashed to shivers against some protruding rocks, amidst the foam and fury at the foot of a rapid.' In passing down one of these, where the river, full of large rocks and boulders, was hemmed in by a wall of ice, and the stream flying with the force and velocity of a torrent, the boat was lightened of her cargo; and 'I stood,' says Back, 'on a high rock, with an anxious heart, to see her run it. It was impossible not to feel that one crash would be fatal to the expedition. Away they went with the speed of an arrow, and in a moment the foam and rocks hid them from my view. I heard what sounded in my ear like a wild shriek; I followed with an agitation which may be conceived, and to my inexpressible joy, found that the shriek was the triumphant whoop of the crew, who had landed safely in a small bay below.'

On the 16th July, after having passed some heavy rapids and cascades, a large stream, as broad as the Thames at Westminster, fell from the south-east into Back's River. On the 19th July, having reached the parallel of 66° latitude, they entered a lake of immense extent, full of deep bays on every side and without any current. Here it puzzled them exceedingly to find out the spot where the water was discharged into the river; but the worst was 'the startling sight of extensive and unbroken fields of ice, stretching to the extremest point of vision.' At length, however, on the 22d July, after threading a passage through a barrier of ice in the south-eastern corner of this large sheet of water, which is called Lake Macdougall, and in a comparatively contracted channel, they discovered 'the whole force of the water gliding smoothly but irresistibly towards two stupendous gneiss rocks, from five to eight hundred feet high, rising like islands on either side.' From hence a series of falls succeeded, which made it necessary to carry every article of their cargo over a long portage. The passage of the boat was most alarming. 'Repeatedly did the strength of the current hurl the boat within an inch of destruction, and as often did these able and intrepid men ward off the threatened danger.'

Strong and heavy rapids with falls and whirlpools for the next eighty or ninety miles kept the men in a constant state of exertion and anxiety, when they came at length to one that turned out to be the last, as it was the most formidable that had yet occurred; and here they fell in with, and took by surprise, a party of Esquimaux, who were not a little as-

tonished to look upon a set of beings so different from any they had hitherto been accustomed to see:—

'Some called out to us, and others made signs, warning us, as we thought, to avoid the fall, and cross over to their side of the water; but when our intention of doing so was apparent, the men ran towards us, brandishing their spears, uttering loud yells, and, with wild gesticulations, motioning to us not to land.'—p. 379.

Captain Back landed alone, and, without visible weapon, walked deliberately up to them, and, imitating their own action of throwing up his hands, called out *Timā*—peace. In an instant their spears were flung upon the ground, and, placing their hands on their breasts, they also called out *Timā*. Some brass buttons, fish-hooks, and other trifles soon gained their confidence and good will. They had a few tents of poles and skins, five canoes, knives, spears and arrows; and their whole number might be about thirty-five. Back had recollected a few words of their language, and had with him a vocabulary, so that he was able to make them comprehend his wants, the chief of which was information. One of them, an intelligent fellow, drew on paper the line of the river on the right bank to the northward, and gave it a sudden and extraordinary bend to the southward. He then led Back to the summit of the highest rock, and made a curve with his hand from west to east, repeating very quick, 'Tarrooke, tarrooke'—the sea, the sea; and having brought his hand to bear about E.S.E., he at once stopped, saying—'Tarrooke naga,' &c.; importing that, in that direction, there was no sea, but plenty of musk-oxen. Captain Back here observes that 'where there is no common language for the interchange of ideas, all conclusions must at best be uncertain; and few men have so much mastery over themselves as not to lean unconsciously towards a preconceived opinion.' He is quite right; and he might have instanced, among the 'tales of travellers,' long and minute accounts of the manners, customs, religion, and even biographies of this secluded and dwarfish race, furnished by those who knew scarcely the most common words of their language. Here, however, the man's words and signs accorded with his drawing, and were subsequently verified.

These good-natured and friendly people were of essential service to Captain Back; for information having been brought to him by his men, that the fall was so tremendous that no boat could survive the descent, and that the crew were quite unequal to the task of conveying it over the long and lofty port-

age, he made significant signs to the Esquimaux to lend them a helping hand. 'The request was cheerfully complied with, and with their assistance we succeeded in carrying the boat below the fall; so that, in reality, I was indebted to them for getting to the sea at all.'

On the 29th July, the day after parting with the Esquimaux, on the fog clearing up, they got sight of a majestic headland in the extreme distance to the north, on the eastern side of the river, which had so coast-like an appearance that no doubt could be entertained of its being one side of the opening into the sea; and so it proved to be on approaching it, and received the name of her Royal Highness the Princess Victoria. On the party arriving at this promontory, Captain Back thus sums up a brief and general view of this impetuous river:—

'This, then, may be considered as the mouth of the Thlew-ee-choh, which, after a violent and tortuous course of five hundred and thirty geographical miles, running through an iron-ribbed country without a single tree on the whole line of its banks, expanding into fine large lakes with clear horizons, most embarrassing to the navigator, and broken into falls, cascades, and rapids, to the number of no less than eighty-three in the whole, pours its waters into the Polar Sea in latitude 67 degrees 11 minutes N., and longitude 94 degrees 30 minutes W.; that is to say, about thirty-seven miles more south than the mouth of the Copper Mine River, and nineteen miles more south than that of Back's River at the lower extremity of Bathurst's Inlet.'—p. 390.

After a perusal of the narrative of this part of the expedition, we must say that the difficulties which Captain Back and his 'brave band of brothers' had to encounter, the dangers to which they were frequently exposed in overcoming them, the fatigue and privations they had to endure, and, in the midst of all, the patience, good humor, and willingness manifested on some very trying occasions, are above all praise; and more particularly so when, at an advanced period of the year, all the symptoms of winter had begun to threaten them with incarceration in the most desolate, inhospitable, and, from the experience he had of it, detestable region of the globe. In the best possible view of their condition, they had before them the undisguised and not to be concealed truth, that the return to their winter-quarters must be made by the same long and arduous route, now rendered doubly difficult and arduous by having all the rapids, and falls, and cascades opposing, instead of aiding, their progress.

But other difficulties and hardships awaited

them. Though the main object of the expedition no longer existed, Captain Back was anxious not to leave the coast until he had gained all the geographical information that the circumstances of the weather and the advanced season of the year would allow; but the whole of the estuary of the river was blocked up with ice. The bluff point described by the Esquimaux was full before them, at a short distance beyond Cape Victoria; but to have attempted to double that point, amidst the obstacles that surrounded them, would have involved them in inextricable difficulties; for the prevailing westerly winds and current packing the drift ice into Prince Regent's Inlet would have rendered their return utterly impossible. This bluff point, which was named Cape Hay, appears to be the northern extreme of the eastern coast. The weather for ten days continued chilly, wet, and foggy; during which they were mostly blocked up by ice, and unable to make any progress. This was mortification enough; but it was not all. The reindeer moss and a species of fern, the only products of this desolate region, were so much soaked with wet that they would not burn; so that, although they could and did kill deer, and might have got musk-oxen, they had no means of cooking their flesh—not even to boil a little water for tea. In eight days, we think Back says, they had but one hot meal. In this cheerless and wretched condition, without fire—without any species of warm food—the rain scarcely ceasing for a moment, except to give way to snow—in such a state of suffering—and in total ignorance of what might be their future fate,—we agree with Captain Back, that 'it cannot be a matter of astonishment, and much less of blame, that even the best men, numbed in their limbs, and dispirited by the dreary and unpromising prospect before them, broke out for a moment into low murmurings that theirs was a hard and painful duty.'

An event, apparently of trifling importance, was sufficient to divert their attention for a time from their deplorable situation. On the 10th August they had reached the latitude of 68° 10' on the western side of the estuary, from whence a party was sent to the westward to make observations. In the evening of that day, the Captain says—

'A shout of "What have you got there?" announced the return of the men: the jocular answer of "A piece of the North Pole," immediately brought Mr. King and myself from out the tent; and we found that they had really picked up a piece of drift-wood nine feet long and nine inches in diameter, together with a few sticks of smaller drift-wood, and a part of a canoe. When the large trunk was sawed, I was rather surprised to see it very little sod-

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den with water; a proof that it could not have been exposed for any considerable time to its action. From the peculiar character of the wood, which was pine, of that kind which is remarkable for its freedom from knots, I had no doubt that it had originally grown somewhere in the upper part of the country, about the Mackenzie; and of this I was the more competent to judge from my recollection of the drift-wood west of that large river, which it exactly resembled. Though we had strong reasons to be grateful for this unlooked-for treasure, as affording us the means of enjoying a hot meal—the first for several days,—yet there were other considerations which gave it in my eyes a far greater importance. In it I saw what I thought an incontrovertible proof of the set of a current from the westward along the coast to our left, and that consequently we had arrived at the main line of the land: for it is a fact well known to the officers of both Sir John Franklin's expeditions, that the absence of drift-wood was always regarded as an infallible sign that we had gone astray from the main, either among islands or in some such opening as Bathurst's Inlet, where, by reason of the set of the current, not a piece of any size was found.—p. 413.

Several other pieces of drift-wood, besides this log, were found by Mr. King, also a musk-ox and the greater part of the vertebra and ribs of a whale, lying on the beach. No doubt could be entertained of all these being brought by the current from the westward. Captain Back was very desirous, but the difficulty was how, to get upon that coast, wedged in as they were by a body of ice that seemed to fill the whole extent of the estuary, which in its narrowest part appears by the chart to be twenty miles, and its depth from Victoria Headland to Point Richardson seventy miles. All that could be done was to despatch a party overland to trace the coast to the westward, but they had only been able to follow the shore about fifteen miles with the greatest exertion and hard labor, sinking into snow and swamp mid-leg deep at every step. The naked and uniform surface was broken only by one green hill, to which was given the name of Mount Barrow. From the summit of this hill was seen a wide opening in the land to the south-west,—in all probability the estuary of another river. 'To the north-east,' says Captain Back, 'there was water and ice, and beyond it a dark-grey or what is denominated a water-sky, while from the east to Cape Hay there was an open sea.'

On the evening of the 13th August, when wedged in on every side, and not ten yards of open water to be seen in any part of the estuary, suddenly, as if by magic, the whole body of ice began to drift with great rapidity

in the direction of west-north-west. 'I was convinced, therefore,' says Back, 'that there must be in that particular bearing either a main sea or a very deep opening, to have allowed the escape of so great a portion of the immense extent of ice before us.' The next day a north-west wind brought it all back again. Captain Back had hoped that the permanent opening of the ice would have afforded him the means of tracing the coast as far as Cape Turnagain; but it was now—the 18th August—but too clear that any such hope must be abandoned.

'I had for some time cherished the notion of dividing the party, leaving four to protect the boat and property, whilst the remainder, with Mr. King, would have accompanied me on a land journey towards Point Turnagain; but this scheme was completely frustrated by the impracticability of carrying any weight on a scil in which at every step we sunk half-leg deep, destitute of shrubs or moss for fuel, and almost without water, over which we must have travelled for days to have made even a few miles of longitude; and where, finally, if sickness had overtaken any one, his fate would have been inevitable. Thus circumstanced, therefore, and reflecting on the long and dangerous stream, combining all the bad features of the worst rivers in the country that we had to retrace, the hazards of the falls and rapids, and the slender hope which remained of our attaining one mile farther, I assembled the men, and informed them that the period fixed upon by his Majesty's government for my return had arrived; and that it now only remained to unfurl the British flag, and salute it with three cheers in honor of his Most Gracious Majesty, whilst his royal name should be given to this portion of America by the appellation of "William the Fourth's Land." The appeal was heartily responded to, and the loyal service was performed with the cheering accompaniment of a good glass of grog.'

Cape Richardson, the extreme point seen to the northward, is in lat. 68° 46' N., long. 96° 20' W.; Ross's Obelisk in lat. 69° 31' N., long. 99° 7' W. The bearing therefore of the second from the first is N. 52° W., distance eighty-six English miles; and the probable narrowest part of the strait, which separates the land called Boothia from the continent of America, between Point Richardson and Cape Smyth, thirty English miles. By observations with good needles, the line of variation taken at Back's extreme point passes a little to the eastward of Captain James Ross's magnetic pole.

The fact of the drift-wood at this point of North America establishes, we think beyond a doubt, the continuity of the coast from the mouth of Mackenzie's River, and of the current by which alone it could have been

brought; it also proves the existence of a channel between the northern coast of America, and the spot where Captain James Ross erected his obelisk; and this receives a further confirmation from the immense field of ice which broke away to the westward, where there must have been an open channel to receive it. The water and ice, and the grey sky to the N.E., pointed directly to the strait of the Fury and Hecla, indicating an approach to the perpetual current which sets through that strait, and which can only proceed from the western sea, there being none in Prince Regent's Inlet to the northward of that strait. The clear sea to the eastward of Cape Hay proved the correctness of the Esquimaux information, and was, in all probability, connected with another estuary falling into Prince Regent's Inlet, at the bottom of which may be the mouth of another river, running behind the mountains parallel to Back's River; and here will no doubt be found the place mentioned by the Esquimaux to Parry, and subsequently to Ross, under the name of *Accolee*, supposed to be not more than forty or fifty miles from the head of Wager Bay.

We have considered the drift-wood to be, as Captain Back does, decisive of the continuance of the current from the westward, because by no other possible means could it have reached the point where it was found. The last remains of anything like wood, stunted firs and bushes, were seen in latitude $63^{\circ} 15' N.$ on the banks of the southern waters, or those which flowed into the Great Slave Lake; not a stick of any description was seen on the whole extent of Back's River; and Dr. Richardson observes 'that none of the rivers on this part of the coast (the eastward of Hearne's River) bring down any drift-timber.' The eastern side of America, through which Back's River flows, is composed of mountainous ridges of granite, porphyry, and slaty gneiss, with sandy barrens strewn over with large granitic boulders. How different is the western coast of Norway, where forests of firs and birches are found growing as high up as the 70th parallel of latitude!

It will not be necessary for us to notice the laborious exertions of the party on their return. If they were severe on their descent of this impetuous river, how much more so must have been the ascent against the general current, the rapids and the portages, with increasing cold and stormy weather. At Garry's Lake they encountered a party of Esquimaux, which might amount to sixty persons, but they were shy, and no communication was had with them; they were supposed to have come from Wager

Bay or Chesterfield Inlet. The whole tract was utter desolation; now and then a solitary white wolf, a wounded deer, or a musk-ox, might be seen sauntering near the bank of the river; even the mosquitos and the sand-flies were either dead or had buried themselves till the resurrection to a new life the following spring; the berries had not ripened, but were hanging green on the bushes. For thirty-six days they had tugged their boat against the stream or over the portages, making the average about fourteen miles a-day, when, on the 20th September, they fell in with Mr. McLeod, at Sand-hill Bay, at the head of Aylmer Lake, where he had been waiting for them four days. The descent from hence to Fort Reliance occupied only a few days; but the day previous to their arrival they found it impossible to get their boat over the portage of Anderson's Falls, and were compelled to leave it behind.

At a short distance from Fort Reliance, and near to the mouth of the river which discharges the waters of the chain of large lakes—the Aylmer, the Clinton-Golden, and the Artillery—into the Great Slave Lake, is one of the grandest objects in nature, a tremendous waterfall, the description of which we must leave to Back:—

'From the only point at which the greater part of it was visible, we could distinguish the river coming sharp round a rock, and falling into an upper basin almost concealed by intervening rocks: whence it broke in one vast sheet into a chasm between four and five hundred feet deep, yet in appearance so narrow that we fancied we could almost step across it. Out of this the spray rose in misty columns several hundred feet above our heads; but as it was impossible to see the main fall from the side on which we were, in the following spring I paid a second visit to it, approaching from the western bank. The road to it, which I then traversed in snow shoes, was fatiguing in the extreme, and scarcely less dangerous; for, to say nothing of the steep ascents, fissures in the rocks, and deep snow in the valleys, we had sometimes to creep along the narrow shelves of precipices, slippery with the frozen mist that fell on them. But it was a slight which well repaid any risk. My first impression was of a strong resemblance to an iceberg in Smeerenberg Harbor, Spitzbergen. The whole face of the rocks forming the chasm was entirely coated with blue, green, and white ice, in thousands of pendent icicles; and there were, moreover, caverns, fissures, and overhanging ledges in all imaginable varieties of form, so curious and beautiful as to surpass anything of which I had ever heard or read. The immediate approaches were extremely hazardous, nor could we obtain a perfect view of the lower fall, in consequence of the projection of the western cliffs. At the lowest

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position which we were able to attain, we were still more than a hundred feet above the level of the bed of the river beneath; and this, instead of being narrow enough to step across, as it had seemed from the opposite heights, was found to be at least two hundred feet wide.

'The color of the water varied from a very light to a very dark green; and the spray, which spread a dimness above, was thrown up in clouds of light grey. Niagara, Wilberforce's Falls in Hood's River, the falls of Kakabikka near Lake Superior, the Swiss or Italian falls,—although they may each "charm the eye with dread," are not to be compared to this for splendor or effect. It was the most imposing spectacle I had ever witnessed; and, as its berg-like appearance brought to mind associations of another scene, I bestowed upon it the name of our celebrated navigator, Sir Edward Parry, and called it Parry's Falls.'—p. 451—453.

Among the many beautiful prints which decorate this work, we should have been glad to see one of this extraordinary cascade, but the continued volume of spray, which concealed the water, like that of an Iceland geyser, the difficulty of getting to any spot whence a view of the whole could be comprehended, and the horrible state of the weather, rendered it impossible to obtain any intelligible sketch of it. From this cataract, however, we may obtain a rough estimate of the whole fall of Back's River. Taking Lake Aylmer at 600 feet, which is as nearly as may be on the same level as Sussex Lake, the source of the Back, and Sluvo Lake at 200 feet above the level of the sea (as estimated on a former expedition), the whole fall of the Back, from Sussex Lake to the sea, will be 800 feet; and taking the length of the river at 620 English miles, the average fall will be 1.3 feet per mile.

We must not close the book without once more expressing our high opinion of its general interest—as depicting artlessly and unconsciously the noble mind and character of its author. It is needless, after the extracts we have given, to add that the narrative is clearly and vigorously penned. As a literary composition, indeed, it may perhaps rank higher than any former volume of that valuable *library* which we owe to the Marine Worthies engaged in the Northern expeditions.

Whether it be owing to the return of Back, or the fitting-out of ships of war to proceed in search of the unfortunate whalers, the public mind has again been turned with considerable zeal to the subject of northern geography and the northwest passage. Numerous propositions having been made to the Royal Geographical Society on the subject, they appointed a committee to collect the opinions

of those best acquainted with what has been done and what still remains to be done. Three letters, one from Sir John Barrow, the President, a second from Dr. Richardson, and a third from Sir John Franklin, have been printed, and copies of them are now before us.

Sir John Barrow sets out by stating that the honor which England has acquired among the continental nations of Europe by her successful exertions in extending our knowledge of the globe, both by sea and land, has very naturally created in the public mind an ardent desire that further endeavors should be made to complete what has been left unfinished. He states his opinion that the practicability of a northwest passage, after the experience that has been acquired, will scarcely admit of a doubt;—that England would be held altogether inexcusable were she to suffer any other nation, by her own indifference to rob her of all her previous discoveries, by passing through the door which she had herself opened;—that the honor would descend upon him who first stepped over the threshold, and not on him who led the way to it; just as Vasco de Gama has run away with the honor of having discovered the Cape of Good Hope, which had been passed ten years before by Bartholomew Diaz. He observes, that this is a question which has never been lost sight of by the government; that it was the favorite object of Elizabeth; that it has met with encouragement from almost every succeeding sovereign; that rewards have been offered by Parliament for its completion; and, in a word, that it has become distinctly and unequivocally a national object. He tells us there is at the Russian settlement close Behring's Strait a bold, intelligent, and enterprising governor (the Baron Wrangel), whose mind is turned to geographical discovery, who has passed fifty-eight days on the Arctic Siberian Sea, and has two corvettes on his station—and that there is every reason to believe he waits only the consent of his government to try his fortune on an enterprise, the success of which would confer on his name immortal honor.

The water communication between the Atlantic and Pacific being fully established, the President goes on to explain the causes of the failures that have hitherto occurred. He says, the attempt can only be considered as experimental; that the proper route was unknown; that to pass the winter in the frozen ocean was new; that it was therefore quite natural to cling to some shore—and that *hence* originated the failures; that the heavy ice grounding on the coasts, especially on those of narrow straits, into which it has

been drifted, not only endangered the safety of the ships, one of which was totally wrecked, a second nearly so, and a third abandoned—but, after being shut up for nine or ten months of the year, any attempt to make progress the second season was utterly paralyzed. He therefore recommends that king's ships, properly strengthened, should avoid the straits and shores, and keep to the broad and open sea, wholly free of ice in summer, and but partially covered in winter; he instances the *Granville Bay* whaler, as being shut up and drifted in the ice six hundred miles, without any material injury—and argues that a king's ship has therefore little to apprehend if so shut up.

He next asks, 'Where is this open sea to be found?' and answers the question by referring to the accounts given by Franklin, Richardson, Elson (the master of Beechey's ship) and Captain James Ross. From these it appears, that along the whole coast of America no land was seen to the northward, that the sea was mostly free from ice, and that the few small detached masses offered no obstruction to the navigation even of the Esquimaux canoes. Captain James Ross proceeded along the western coast of what has been improperly called Boothia (for Parry had discovered and wintered upon it), first to the northward, where he fixed the place of the magnetic pole, and then to the southward, where he erected his obelisk; but in no part of his journey did he see any land to the westward, nor any impediment to the navigation of that sea: this officer also states his opinion, that this west coast trends northerly to Cape Walker, where Parry has described a wide opening to the southward. Sir John therefore concludes, and we think reasonably enough, 'that between the coast of America and the northern islands (Melville and others) there is a broad open sea, open enough for a ship of war to make her way through it.' As it has been proved that no difficulty exists in the passage through Lancaster Sound and Barrow's Strait, that open sea, it may be presumed, is easily attainable; 'and in such case,' says the President, 'I do not think it too much to express a hope that the passage (the northwest) would be accomplished, and perhaps in one year.'

The other two papers are purely geographical. Dr. Richardson recommends that an expedition should be sent over the same ground already traversed, to take up its winter quarters at the eastern end of Great Bear Lake; that from hence it should complete the survey of the coast to the westward of the Mackenzie River, and after that to the eastward of Point Turnagain. He then lays down the plan to be pursued, the

number of men and boats to be employed, and cuts out work enough for at least a three years' expedition. He admits, however, that the eastern portion falls under the plan of Sir John Franklin, and that no better plan could be suggested.

This plan of Sir John Franklin is as follows:—that a ship, or two small vessels, with two boats, be sent to Wager River, which he supposes cannot be more than forty miles from the extremity of Prince Regent's Inlet; each boat to carry eight persons, with two months' provisions: the one to be employed in tracing the coast westward towards the part reached by Captain Back, and thence onwards to Point Turnagain; the other to follow the east shore of Prince Regent's Inlet, up to the Strait of Hecla and Fury. He lays down the detail of the plan for regulating the proceedings of the two parties, and their return to the ship or ships in Wager Bay. He recommends Captain James Ross and Captain Back as the most proper officers for carrying his plan into execution; and adds, 'in case of either of them not being at hand when the expedition ought to sail, I should feel the greatest pleasure in filling his place.' Since this, however, Sir John Franklin has obtained a more eligible employment, and a well-deserved reward of his noble career, in the appointment of governor of Van Dieman's Land.

Captain Beaufort, the masterly hydrographer of the Admiralty, appears to have been called in to pronounce an opinion on the above plans. He commences by observing that 'every year seems to bring forward some accession of interest to the great question of the north-west passage, and of the northern configuration of America.' He says 'that there is an open and, at times, a navigable sea passage between the Straits of Davis and Behring there *can be no doubt* in the mind of any person who has duly weighed the evidence; and it is equally certain that it would be an intolerable disgrace to this country were the flag of any other nation to be borne through it before our own; that he is satisfied that the mode proposed by Sir John Barrow is the most prudent that could be adopted; that the eastern attempt by Cape Horn, advocated by some, would be highly imprudent, for reasons which he states: but he thinks the Geographical Society should recommend to his Majesty's government a humble and more temporary field of action, more appropriate to the nature of the institution, more easy and economical in its execution, and more certain and rapid in its result; that to fix the proper moment for effecting the ambitious object of

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